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FICTIONAL ENGRAVINGS.

A Word of Advice to Purchasers.

HE advent of a new work of art, of high merit, is an interesting occasion, and particularly so when the public is to become participants in the possession of the work.

Such advents really are of rare occurrence. Of the multitude of pictures offered, in engraving, to our people, very few indeed have been of a high order of excellence—the mass of them have been little else than impostures.

It is true that certain print and newspaper publishers have brought forward steel plates, prints in oil colors, "chromolithographs," and lithographs not "chromo," which have been disposed of at prices varying with the market sought; but we have yet to see any such lithograph which was what it was represented as a work of art, or which was worth one quarter of the sum asked for it.

We are convinced that the public has been imposed upon in its patronage of print publishers—that it has been paying from two to four hundred per centum too much for the engravings and lithographs referred to, which, by extensive puffery and voluminous advertising, have found their way over the whole length and breadth of our country.

This will become evident from the fact that the "Cosmopolitan Art Association" has been able to furnish, for less than three dollars, its pure steel plate engravings, of large size and high artistic merit—the price of which in the trade would have been fixed at from ten to fifteen dollars, for plain impressions, and proportionately more for proofs. The engraving of "Sir Walter Scott and his Friends," a companion piece to "Shakspeare and his Friends," is not to be had for less than ten dollars, for a print impression, and is pronounced "remarkably cheap" at that. It is, in reality, worth less than the "Shakspeare," which is supplied for three dollars, with the other benefits of the Association thrown in!

We advert to this matter, in this definite manner, that the public may become purchasers of engravings with some knowledge of their actual worth. The numerous prints, of various titles, which are being introduced, and urged upon the public with certificates of "eminent

judges," which command "notices" almost *ad libitum* (we ought to add *ad nau-seum*), renders it necessary that the "uninitiated" should be given a word of warning to invest their dollars, or shillings, as the case may be, with the utmost caution. We know of certain houses which are making large sales of pictures, at one dollar each, that do not cost to exceed fifteen cents to produce; and yet, these very cheap prints have obtained notices, from apparently respectable sources, which even Landseer's "Midsummer's Night Dream" could scarcely command! It is to the disgrace of any respectable editor, or divine, if he lend his name to perpetuate a deception; yet it is a fact beyond denial that many of our leading papers—religious and otherwise—have noticed, in a flattering manner, pictures as "chromo-lithographs," as "fine works of the burin"—as "charming works of art"—which are simple stone cuts, done from transfers without as much real art in their production, and in their coloring and etching, as we frequently see in lithographic advertisements! One of two things is certain: either the writers of those notices and certificates are very ignorant of art, or are very careless of their use of words. In charity, we believe the first reason to be the true one, although they would be astonished to have ignorance imputed to them.

A good engraving, like a good painting or a good statue, requires—1st, real genius in its composition; and 2d, vast labor in its production. If either be wanting, it is, necessarily, defective as a work of *true art*; and, where the aids of machinery, and tint blocks or stones, are brought into use, the work has no claims to real art—it is a mere piece of *mechanism* which can reproduce itself millions of times, if necessary.

A good steel engraving is the nearest approach that can be made to the individuality of a painting; and he only is esteemed a good engraver who can reproduce the very thought, spirit, and expression of the artist. We, therefore, find first-class steel engravers very few—their number in this country not exceeding half-a-dozen. When we add that years are consumed in the production of one large plate, the reader will readily see why it is that a steel engraving, from a first-class hand, is the best, as a work of art, of all prints, and why, of necessity, it is so much more expensive than other

kinds of engravings, as, for instance, those upon stone, copper, or wood.

An engraving on stone is a work which employs comparatively inferior order of talent. It is done with great rapidity, and when once done, *duplicate* casts of the etching can be taken so as to render the process of reproduction and printing one of ease and cheapness. If colors are added, it is the merely mechanical operation of the press, from sectional blocks—no higher art enters into the work than any printer in colors can exercise. Such at least are the "chromo-lithographs" to which we have referred.

We desire to injure no man's business; but we cannot, as conscientious caterers to the art-wants and tastes of the country, be silent when the public is being led into a false appreciation of art—is adopting imperfect standards of excellence—all through the misjudged notices and expressions of the conductors of the American press. Let those who prefer a lithograph to a pure steel plate exercise their preference; but let them not be deceived into paying fine-art prices for the mechanical print.

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AN ART REMINISCENCE.—In the library of Hamilton College, is a pair of paintings, by Daniel Huntington, whose history is worth the telling. One of them, a portrait of Hon. S. Newton Dexter, one of the benefactors of the college, is an example of what Huntington can do in the ripeness and full vigor of his powers. The colors are thrown upon the canvas with that freedom and reckless certainty of expression which show the last degree of artistic skill. The other is a rude picture, painfully elaborated, on a warped panel, of an eccentric individual who did college "chores" in 1834, when Huntington was a sophomore in the institution. The tradition is, that young Huntington was more attached to his pigment than to trigonometry—that he burnt more midnight oil over Sir Joshua Reynolds than the Graeca Majora. When "Professor Switchell" came along to do the daily chambermaiding, Huntington would detain him with a story, and catch a little of his peculiar face. The result was a *premier-né*, which good luck has rescued from oblivion. It will be highly suggestive to some future historian of American Art. It certainly gives us a pleasant glimpse of the Artist's early tastes.